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ABSTRACT

Two hundred twenty-six 5th and 6th graders were the subjects of this study to correlate amount of television viewing and reading scores. It was found that the average viewing time per week for girls was 28 hours and for boys 30 hours. A slight relationship was reported between reading ability and amount of leisure time spent watching television. The better readers were found to watch less television than poor readers. Among the children surveyed, a low percentage of parental supervision of television was reported. Only 38% of the children stated that they were not allowed to watch some shows. Only 28% said that they were allowed to watch television as long or as late as they wished. No relationship was shown between a child's access to a private TV and his viewing time or reading ability. Other studies of the influence of television viewing on children are discussed throughout the report. The authors conclude that not all television viewing is a bad influence on the child and that a child should be taught to be a discriminating television viewer. (JG)

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Reading? Does Television Viewing Time Affect It?

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When the television set invaded the home, some years back, many parents and educators began to worry about the effct on the minds of their children. The early studies seemed to predict such dire results from the use of TV that it would have to be banned from the homes. Now this attitude is very much out-of-date. Parents and educators have accepted television as another medium of communication--not all good, but certainly not all bad either.

Because television was new, back in the '50's and '60's, some tended to be overly fearful of it. It took awhile to realize that "every new medium of communication has in it's time aroused anxiety--the cinema, radio, and at one time (a chastening thought) even reading." (Himmelweit, 5, p. 23) In fact we are still struggling somewhat to adjust. This study was presented in an attempt to clarify the relationship between reading and television watching.

This survey was conducted at an elementary school in a mid-western suburban city. The N was 226 fifth and sixth graders. Their ages were nine through eleven years: 124 eleven-year-olds, 80 ten-year-olds, 15 twelve-year-olds, 4 nine-year-olds, and three undetermined.

Five different levels of reading abilities were represented. The children had been assigned to their reading groups by the 1972-73 teachers on the basis of their reading and language abilities. No diagnostic reading scores were available.

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The levels ranged from eight through twelve years and were based on a reading program published by Ginn and Company. The lowest level was eight years and would be equivalent to an upper third or fourth grade reading ability. The highest level was twelve and could be equated to a "good" high school student.

A tally of the answers to this survey presents the following figures and graphs on pages 3, 4, and 5.

The average viewing time for the entire 226 students was 29 hours per week. Girls watched slightly below this average (28 hours) and boys watched slightly more (30 hours). This is similar to the averages sighted by other studies: Frank (4, p.11) reports 22-1/2 hours; Lyle, (8, p.7) five hours on a school day.

The graphs composed from these figures plainly show that there is a relationship between reading abilities and the amount of leisure time students spend watching television. The better readers watch less television than the poor readers. The relationship found by this survey is slight, but distinct, and follows the pattern found in most of the other studies consulted: that is that viewing time is negatively related to intellectual level. (The more intelligent students are also the better readers.) The relationship begins to appear in the upper elementary grades and grows stronger through the junior and senior high school years.

One important study seems, at first glance, to be opposed to this, but closer examination shows it really is not entirely. That is the recent Lyle and Hoffman (8, p. 221) report which found that the more intelligent child actually watches more television than the average child, but he also watches better programs (more about this later) and reads more books and

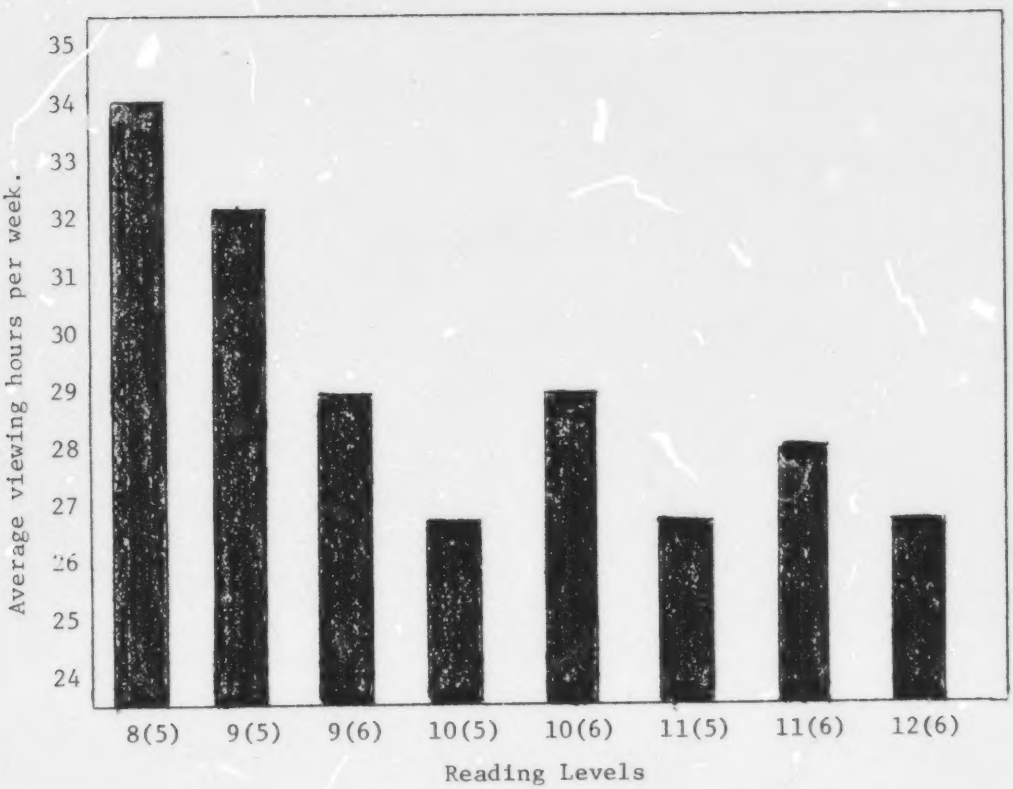
Table 1

Average hours of viewing per child for one week.

Reading Level	Entire Group	Girls Only	Boys Only
8 (5)	34	35	33
9 (5)	32	25	36-1/2
9 (6)	29	31	29
10 (5)	26-1/2	25	28
10 (6)	29	33	26
11 (5)	26-1/2	25	28
11-12 (6)	28	26-1/2	29
12 (6)	26-1/2	24	30
Totals	29	28	30

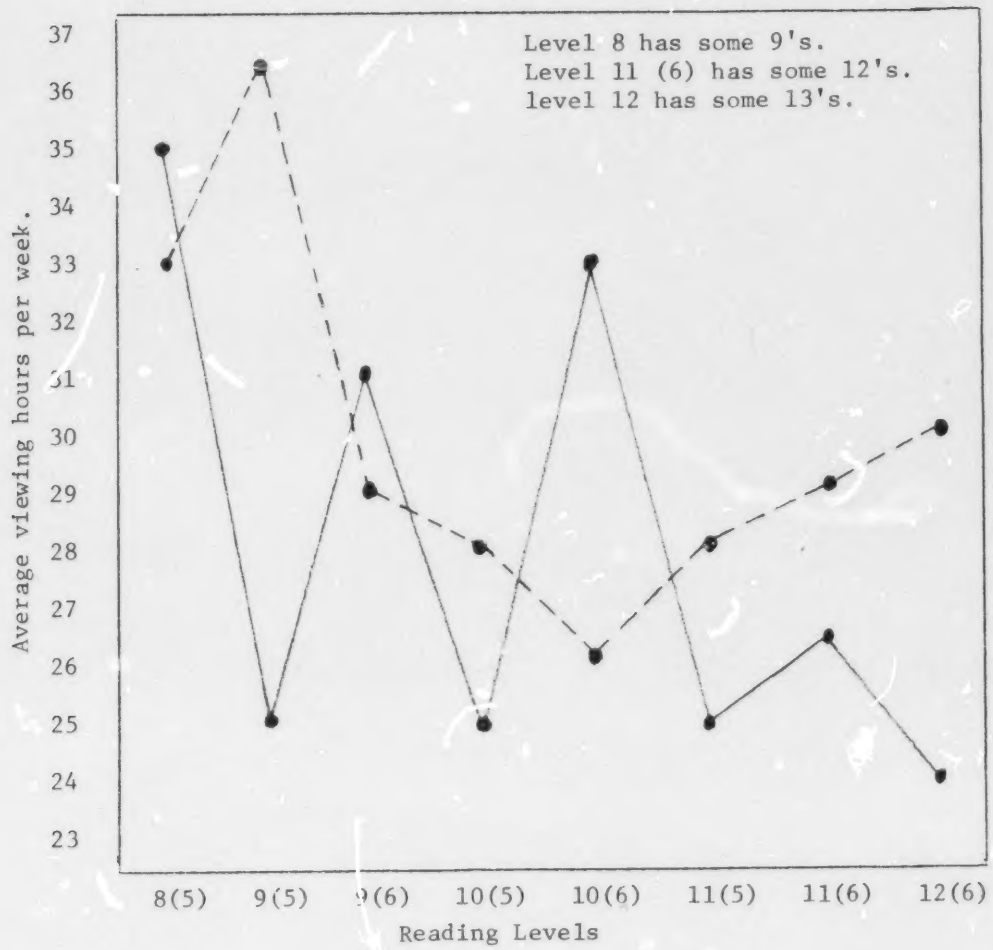
(The numbers in parentheses represent grade levels.)

Graph No. 1



(Numbers in parentheses represent grade levels.)

Graph No. 2



(Numbers in parentheses represent grade levels.)

Boys - - - - - -

Girls ————

newspapers, and listens to more radio, and takes part in more sports and social activities. The student who watched more television than the average, but without the support of the other media and activities, was intellectually inferior and poorly adjusted emotionally and socially. Here the lowest students and the cream-of-the-crop seem to have been measured against the run-of-the-mill students, a grouping system not used in the other studies under consideration.

To keep these findings in perspective, a few further facts should be noted. First of all, television has been beneficial in some ways, and that fact must not be thrown aside. It's common knowledge that all persons (regardless of mental ability) retain better the facts which they see, as well as hear or read. The average first grade child's vocabulary has nearly doubled since he began watching television. (Bean, 1)

Television is also often a stimulus for reading. Ask any librarian about requests she has for books because of something the reader saw on TV. The prime example of this is the BBC's production of "The Forsythe Saga," a soap opera "which resulted in book sales which changed Galsworthy from a virtually forgotten writer into a best seller." (Times, 3)

The next thing to consider is the role of television as "the great leveler of mankind," a conclusion drawn from consideration of these studies. Television is a real boon to the dull child (or the poor reader); he learns an inestimable amount of things which he would never have learned because of his battle against the printed word.

The good done for the dull child is, unfortunately, offset by the possible harm done to the bright student. One study (Himmelweit, 5, p. 24) showed that he fell behind in his reading due to his TV watching. "Viewing

offered him little that was new and kept him away from reading and other sources of learning." But this statement is more of an opinion than a fact. Though it's virtually impossible to prove, the more highly educated parent can't shrug off the feeling that much of television's public broadcasting leads to mental passivity. "It captures the imagination but does not liberate it." (Bettelheim, 2)

Apparently this feeling is not shared by the general populace. Items eight and nine of this survey show a surprisingly low percentage of parental concern of supervision of viewing. Item eight ("Are there any programs which your parents do not allow you to watch?") showed only 38% were not allowed to watch some shows. Another report (Lyle, 8, p. 7) showed three out of five (or 60%) were forbidden to watch some shows.

In item nine ("Are you usually allowed to watch television as long or as late as you wish?) only 28% responded "Yes." Supervision of girls and boys was about the same for this age group. Lyle and Hoffman (8, pp. 168, 169) report 22% of the sixth grade parents limit TV viewing and 35% use TV deprivation as punishment.

The response to item 7 ("Do you have a television set of your own, or one in your own room?") showed no relationship between a child having access to a private TV and his actual viewing time nor to his reading ability. See table number 2 on page 8.

A really heartening fact which this survey did not measure, but which surfaced in other studies is the fact that the brighter students are developing into more discriminating viewers and no longer will watch anything which flashes in front of their eyes (as was true when TV was new). The Lyle report (8, p. 38), which showed that the bright child watches

Table 2

Affirmative responses to Items 7, 8, and 9

(Figures represent percent of total group.)

Reading Level	Item 7 (Own TV)	Item 8 (watch any program)	Item 9 (watch as late as they wish)
8 (5)	55	36	27
9 (5)	39	39	30
9 (6)	47	29	35
10 (5)	35	55	30
10 (6)	57	36	32
11 (5)	24	36	20
11 (6)	39	32	21
12 (6)	30	42	27
Totals	41%	38%	28%

better programs, has already been mentioned. Another (Robinson, 8, p. 583) showed the better students were more selective and watched the educational specials more often. The favorite programs of the average child were cartoons or the situation comedies, but the favorite programs of the more intelligent child (by Stanford-Binet scores) varied much more. (Murray, 8, p. 354)

For the teacher or parents who are concerned about television viewing today, this is a really vital point to consider. There is a goal beyond the simple mechanics of reading or listening or watching. The child must be taught how to read, and after that, to read wisely and discriminately and thoughtfully. He should likewise be taught to turn the dials and push the buttons to operate the television set, but more important, to select only the good programs and reject the trash and trivia and repetition. In either medium, he will finally find his own standard of values and we can strive to make these standards a step higher with each generation. Is that not, after all, what education is all about?

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Vita

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